

**Commission on Aging
Public Policy Committee
Minutes from Meeting 9/7/16**

In attendance

Commission Members: Stephanie Edelstein, John Honig, Rudy Oswald, Chuck Kauffman, Karen Maricheau Jerry Morenoff, Isabelle Schoenfeld

Staff: Odile Brunetto, Director, Area Agency on Aging

Guest: Delegate Kathleen M. Dumais, Esq., Maryland House of Delegates, District 15

Del. Dumais presentation

Del. Dumais gave a run-down on the status of certain bills on which the Commission on Aging had taken a position, including the following:

- HB 718 (Asset Recovery for Exploited Seniors Act). Passed, signed into law 4/12/16; effective 7/1/16.
 - [The CoA wrote a follow-up letter to Governor Hogan requesting the allocations of funds for additional staff in the Attorney General's office to help implement this law. We will not know the outcome of this request until the Governor's budget is released in December]
- HB 1277 and SB 336 (Hospitals – Designation of Lay Caregivers) (Care Act). Passed, signed into law 5/10/16; effective 7/1/16.
 - Similar but unsuccessful legislation in 2015 included stronger language regarding the hospital's obligation to provide a patient with opportunities to designate a caregiver and to inform that caregiver.
- HB 483 (Homeowner's Tax Credit). Failed in Committee. Bill would have increased the income levels for eligibility for state homeowner property tax credit. Note – this is separate from the Montgomery County property tax credit program.
 - Did not pass because of impact on budget. Would have cost state about \$10 million.
- SB 819 (Independent Living Tax Credit Act). Failed in Committee. Hearing but no vote. Bill would have created a state property tax credit for accessible design. Montgomery County already has such a credit on County taxes.
 - Did not pass because of impact on state budget. Will be brought back next session, and more likely to pass. **Recommends that CoA focus on this one.

Also discussed:

- HB 580 (Maryland Healthy Working Families Act). Passed the House, no action in the Senate. Failed. Bill would have required certain employers to provide certain employees with earned sick and safe leave. Montgomery County already has a similar law. This would

have made the requirement statewide. This bill will be reintroduced next year. While the bill was generally opposed by the business community, some provisions were particularly contentious, e.g., requiring a payout for sick leave earned upon termination of employment.

Del. Dumais explained that while some bills enacted into law may not go as far as advocates might have wished, sometimes progress has to be incremental – “baby steps” – and that more can be done in succeeding years to reach goals.

She noted that the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) reaches out to interested stakeholders as they research the background issues for preparation of the fiscal note that accompanies bills. This is an area where the CoA could offer some input. The fiscal note is released on the day of the first hearing on a bill, so any letters to DLS should be sent a couple of weeks prior to that date.

There was some discussion about the creation of a registry of nursing home and other facility staff accused of sexual or other abuse of residents, and the difficulty of balancing due process rights of individuals against resident safety.

Rudy raised the issue of Medicaid coverage of dental care for low-income seniors, and the CoA summer study on this issue. Del Dumais suggested that if the CoA wishes to pursue this issue, that we speak with Dels. Bonnie Cullison and Kirill Reznik.

Big issues for the upcoming session – not specifically senior related - include follow-up to the Justice Reinvestment Act of 2016, www.ma4jr.org/justice-reinvestment, and issues around sexual assault.

Del. Dumais noted that she is looking forward to the CoA Legislative Breakfast.

AAA Director’s Report

Odile reported that the County Council HHS committee, chaired by George Leventhal, will meet with all HHS-related boards and commissions on October 19, 2016. A letter listing CoA priorities will be due on October 11, 2016. Mr. Leventhal asks for each entity’s top two policy priorities, but we can include others. While the focus is not on the budget, it is very useful at this time of preparation for the CoA to be aware of the proposed cost for those priorities. The CoA was very successful in our budget requests last year.

Odile also reported that HHS is looking at a realignment of mental health services, and will be forming a new workgroup to address this, and it will be important to have a CoA representative. Increasing the availability of mental health services for seniors has been a CoA focus in prior years. When the Office of Legislative Services completed a study of county mental health services, there was little information about senior needs and services. In the County, only 2% of the funds budgeted for public mental health care go to mental health services for older adults.

The County is also looking at issues around food insecurity, including for seniors. The Maryland Department of Aging, the Maryland Food Bank and HHS are exploring a request for federal funding available through the “My Groceries to Go” program for low income seniors. This program currently operates in Baltimore City. This would supplement the Meals on Wheels program. Secretary Kramer and Councilmember Berliner are very supportive.

- Rudy asked whether Meals on Wheels is reaching all who request it. Odile will check and will also add this topic to the annual meeting.
- Karen noted the importance of accommodating cultural food preferences.
- Rudy said it would be interesting to know which HHS programs have waiting lists.

The Adult Foster Care Program received the second of three increases in 2016 to bring the County subsidy rate for small assisted living group homes up to the State subsidy rate. We still need the final step of this three step increase.

Fire Rescue Services personnel are now entering into their database, people whom they assist who are vulnerable and would benefit from a follow-up visit. A referral is made to HHS. During the first month of this initiative, FRS made 40 such referrals. This program is similar to those operating in other communities. Budget advocacy may be needed to support this initiative.

Other issues in which the County Council HHS committee is interested: 1) mental health court program for certain criminal defendants who would benefit from community based mental health services as an alternative to incarceration; 2) Nexus Montgomery.

Age Friendly Update: Workgroups are preparing their draft strategic plans, which are due at the end of September. The AF Senior Fellow position is funded as part of the FY17 budget. HHS and OMB are discussing the possibility of changing the position to a permanent part-time position with benefits, although this has not yet been finalized. Karen and Isabelle offered to work on a draft letter before the next meeting, from the CoA in support of this change.

Advocacy Actions

Rudy reported that the CoA sent three letters since the last meeting: to Governor Hogan re staffing for the AG office discussed above; to the state director of transportation re sidewalks and other pedestrian access near Leisure World; and to the County Executive re the transportation services improvement fund.

Rudy also noted concern about actions in Congress to eliminate SHIP and make significant cuts to the Social Security Administration budget.

Important Dates

- CoA priorities will be determined at the annual meeting on September 22.

- Letter setting forth CoA priorities due to Councilmember Leventhal by October 11. Budget meeting is October 18.
- Next scheduled PPC meeting is October 13. We will try to meet on 10/6/16 instead.
- Proposed date for CoA Legislative Breakfast is November 17 at Holiday Park.

The meeting ended at 11:45 am.